

# IMAGINE

WCU HONORS COLLEGE MAGAZINE 2017



WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY



# WORD FROM THE DEAN

One of my great pleasures this year has been working with so many of our wonderful Honors College students on projects and events to which they bring a tremendous amount of energy and enthusiasm. Along those lines, Imagine magazine is a window into Western Carolina's culture and spirit from the students' perspective. If you are familiar with Imagine, then you know what I'm talking about - and have probably jumped already right into the heart of this year's edition! But if you're new to Imagine, we welcome you into the Catamount family with this introduction to our home in the mountains, our community-minded mission, and our talented students and faculty.

I hope that you will enjoy reading this 2017 edition of Imagine magazine as much as we have enjoyed putting it together for you. Once again, I am blown away with the work of our first-year Honors students in telling the story of Western Carolina University. It has been a pleasure working with Associate Professor of English, Pamela Duncan, who has done an amazing job at guiding these excellent students through the process of creating the content for the magazine. Pam also leads WCU's spring literary festival, which brings nationally and internationally recognized writers to campus each year. She has a passion and dedication to enriching the academic experience for our students and we are truly grateful for her collaboration this year. I feel very lucky as well that we were able to continue working with our excellent design students. Savannah Camper and Todd Charles were both veterans on Imagine from last year and have brought their experience and expertise to the fore with this new edition. Further, they have mentored a new designer on the team this year, first-year Honors College student, Alison Kabrich. This year's magazine has also benefitted from the expertise of Will Huddleston, the Visual Arts Specialist in the WCU's Marketing Department who has brought his wealth of experience and enthusiasm to the project. Will brings his experience working with the university magazine, Western Carolina magazine.

Imagine magazine is not only a literary portal, providing insight and information to members of our community and new friends, but it also is one of the many ways in which The Honors College helps to develop an academically rich Western Carolina University, engaging students with real-world, hands-on experiential learning. We hope that Imagine will help you to stay connected with us, in The Honors College, and with WCU more broadly. If you are an alumnus or friend, we hope that Imagine will connect you with your university and today's students.

We look forward to hearing from you soon!

Jill Nelson Granger

Dean, The Honors College

April 1, 2017

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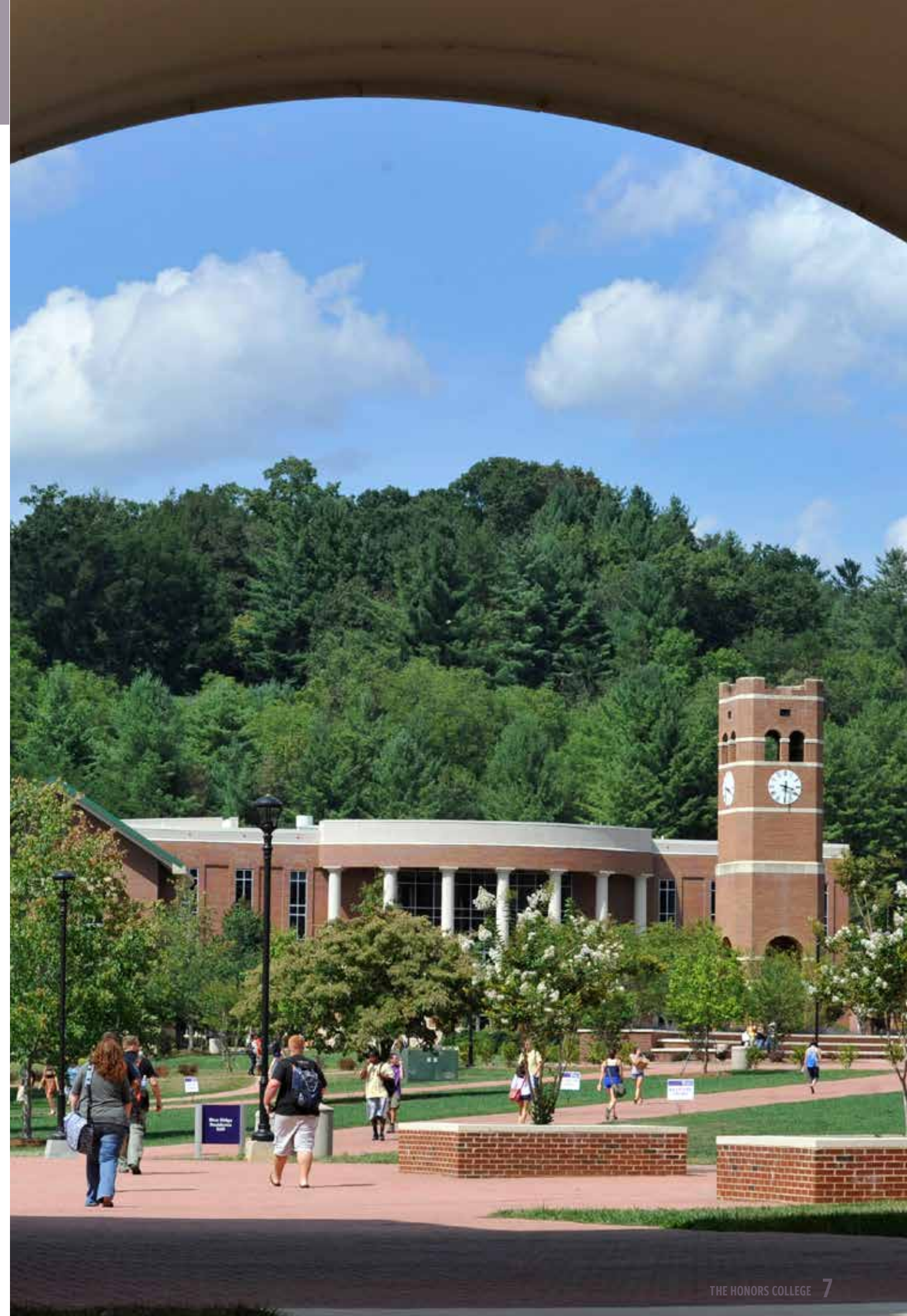
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# WHEE WERE STRANGERS FOUR DAYS AGO

CHLOE DEROSA & BRIE REIDEL

A week before fall semester starts at Western Carolina University, a freshman girl sits at a table filled with strangers. Her shyness overcomes her as the rest of the table chats excitedly, exchanging names. As her fellow campers continue to talk, counselors are introduced, and dinner is served, and she can't help but become more excited and engaged, especially when the topic of the shaving cream party comes up. The girl is welcomed into the open arms of the WCU community as upperclassmen goof off and make fast friends with the newcomers.

This is Cat Camp, a summer camp-like transition program for incoming WCU freshmen. One of the many goals of Cat Camp is to allow people to learn more about themselves and how they work with others, and to encourage them to take leadership roles. Before campers, counselors, and administrators are taken to Bonclarken Conference Center in Flat Rock, NC to spend four days and three nights together, campers are placed in small groups, each headed by two upperclassmen counselors. According to Leslie Cavin, Assistant Director of Leadership in the Department of Campus Activities, the purpose of the smaller groups, also known as "Litters," is to build community by creating "mini-families" within the Camp. There is much secrecy as to what the week of Camp would entail. This secrecy is due in part to the advisors wanting to keep Cat Camp a surprise for every year of incoming freshman and also because of how personal some of the activities are.

"I was confused and it was also nerve-racking because I was going into something that I didn't know much about, but it was also fun to be surprised with everything that was happening around me," said freshman Maddie Denoncour.

During the week, campers and counselors participated in activities which require physical, emotional, and mental involvement as a way to give campers a chance to express themselves in a new way. On a typical day, counselors wake the campers and gather with their Litters, walk up a steep hill to breakfast, finish, walk

down to the gym, and participate in both large group and small group team-building exercises and games. During small group time, the individual Litters bond over sharing personal experiences and engaging in activities that hone in on leadership and trust skills, such as flipping a bed sheet without any of the team members falling off. The large group times are designed for expanding friendships and connections while also continuing to focus on leadership.

"It felt empowering to step in on a hard question and have people follow and step forward. It was a brief leadership role, but it showed me that I had the power to influence others in a positive way, and make them feel comfortable stepping forward," Denoncour said of one of the surprise activities.

Cat Camp was originally designed for students to come together in an off-campus environment. Students choose to attend Cat Camp for many reasons. Meeting new people before school starts, trying to crawl out of shells of shyness, and, as Brooke Bell, a freshman who attended Cat Camp this past summer, explained, even being heavily persuaded by parents are all reasons that incoming freshman choose to apply and participate in Cat Camp; "I was forced to [attend Cat Camp]. My mom said it would help me branch out and find friends for college. And it did. My best friend, well one of them, which led me to my other best friend." Unfortunately, not all incoming freshman can attend Cat Camp. With a cap, this year, of around 125 students, Cat Camp has limited space and is on a first-come, first serve application basis with a \$285 fee.

Cat Campers are encouraged to share with a group of strangers information about themselves that they would not normally share. This may seem intimidating but the environment of Cat Camp is created and intended to be inviting and open-minded without fear of judgment. It provides opportunities for Cat Campers to learn who they are as people. With

cozy cabins, lush greenery, comforting front porches, and a plethora of campers and counselors alike hanging in hammocks together, the feelings of unity and belonging permeate the air.

"I was shy before I came to Cat Camp and while I was there, I learned that I wanted to be the person people came to and be the person people could confide in. The thing that baffles me is that I did not try to be this person; it just happened," said Denoncour.

Leslie Cavin stated that the biggest comment she gets is that people who were campers at Cat Camp got a chance to "be who they really want to be and shed the baggage they had." Cat Camp focuses on each person as an individual and how a welcoming environment can influence the interaction between campers and counselors.

On top of individual group time and planned activities, Cat Camp allows free time in which campers can bond with others outside of their groups, find common ground, and play games together. Staff, counselors, and campers become one large family at Cat Camp, which is one of the many things in which Western Carolina prides itself.

Finally, as camp draws to a close, people stand in the field, armed with shaving cream cans and excitement, campers, counselors, and advisors alike are all waiting for the sign to begin the final big event: the shaving cream party. As soon as the word "GO!" is exclaimed, the war has begun. Laughter, yells, and arms are all flying in the air as friends, once strangers, slather one another in white, fluffy, eye-stinging shaving cream. This final moment of laughter, friendship, and community at Cat Camp does not stay at Bonclarken, it is carried with the campers, counselors, and staff throughout the rest of their time at WCU and beyond.



# RICARDO NAZARIO-COLON

Zoe Caves

He moves from behind his desk to sit at a table with me, his profile stark against a white board filled with black and green ink outlining his ideas. As the new director of the Office of Equal Opportunities and Diversity Programs at Western Carolina University, his thoughts range from LGBTQ+ problems to issues and opportunities of race to programs for gender and identity. He kept many of the plans he hopes will soon be implemented off the record, so as not to raise hopes or undermine others, but it is clear by looking around and speaking to him that Ricardo has big plans for the university.

He was hired into a position largely without parameters at the beginning of the 2016 school year. He chose WCU, he says, because the faculty and staff of the university were clearly open to embracing change. "After the interview," he says, "I walked away with a sincere sense that people wanted to make a difference here." He was excited to work with like-minded people who recognized that diversity and inclusion were ongoing issues on campus. This desire for change may have been set in motion by racially

charged sentiments exhibited on campus at the end of the 2016 spring semester. It could have also been urged by America's changing feelings surrounding wider acceptance, peace, and collaboration in society. If society is evolving, community leaders seem to believe that the campus should be able to create a welcoming environment for all kinds of students, faculty, and staff from many different walks of life.

Before being hired at WCU, Ricardo worked for Morehead University in the same general field of diversity and equal opportunities on campus for students, staff, and faculty. He has a B.A. from the University of Kentucky in Latin American Studies and Spanish Literature, and an M.S. from Pace University in Secondary Education with an emphasis in Spanish. From 1984 to 1992, he served in the Marine Corps.

When asked what he has been hired to do at Western, Ricardo laughs and motions to the board. It has lists and question-marked ideas of how to overcome them. His job, he says, is to start discussions in order to implement change. He considers one of the largest and most important parts of his job to "develop

a variety of programs that promote and encourage conversations around diversity," as well as to serve as a role model for students. He wants to be asked questions. He wants to be a mentor. To be asked what he does, he says, is a step in making sure people are acknowledging the problems.

These problems include a lack of significant racial diversity on campus, a certain ignorance of the Native American cultures and customs that surround us, and a lack of programs and events for LGBTQ+ youth. He also has the desire to immerse students in a safe and welcoming environment. He wants diversity and inclusion to be an integral part of the university's values and goals. His concerns center around those with all kinds of different values, beliefs, races, sexual orientations, genders, and backgrounds. If you have concerns about yourself or others, be assured that Ricardo does too.

He would like to see diversity more included in the heart of the school's values. Creating programs for students who fit different molds, through which they can become involved in campus activities, is an important part of a functioning college community. Ideally, he would like more education surrounding his field, so that students can enter their careers with experience



in diversity, acceptance, and different cultures. A history of immersion, inclusion, and education about the issues is what he would like to look for in faculty and staff hires, as well.

Some don't believe that diversity is as important as Ricardo does, a fact that he admits. But as long as there are those still questioning the way things are and the way things are done, he will be there to help.

"I think at the end of the day, at the heart of the work that I do.... How can I help, not only our students, but our faculty and staff become the best human beings they can?"

Ricardo urges students to talk with him about diversity. Give him your ideas, and converse with him about your concerns, and he will be happy to listen. He is an open, talkative man with hopes and plans that carry so much excitement it warms everyone around him. Diversity, he says, is something we can talk about in a positive way. It's not taboo; it's needed.

"Have the hard conversations," Ricardo says. Take control, and implement change.





## WCU Lands Second Consecutive Howard Hughes Award Winner

Marlon Morgan

Matthew McDonough (*right in photo*) didn't know much about the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Exceptional Research Opportunities Program until he learned that a couple of his Western Carolina University instructors nominated him to participate.

So the junior from Asheville applied and was surprised to be chosen to participate in the program that provides summer research experiences in HHMI scientists' laboratories across the country to undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds and groups underrepresented in the sciences.

"To be selected is quite an honor," said McDonough, a biology major with concentration in molecular biology and a minor in chemistry.

According to biology instructor Maria Gainey, McDonough was an excellent student, but one of her quieter ones while taking the "Phage Hunters" class last year. But once the lessons shifted toward genomics last spring, Gainey noticed that McDonough really excelled. "He mastered (the tools we had) very quickly and kind of took off with the little bit of introduction of everything we gave him. I could tell he was enjoying that," Gainey said.

Jamie Wallen, assistant professor of biochemistry, noticed it as well. Wallen taught the class along with Gainey and

adjunct biology professor Megan Eckhardt. The class is funded by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute as part of its program SEA-Phages, or Science Education Alliance – Phage Hunters Advancing Genomics Evolutionary and Science.

Wallen and Gainey were in agreement when it came to nominating someone for EXROP. It's the second year in a row a WCU student was chosen. Last year, now-senior Alma Plaza-Rodriguez spent the summer doing research at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis.

"It's exciting for us," Gainey said. "The more experiences like this that (the students) can have, especially early on, I think the success just kind of builds. For Alma, it opened up a lot of doors. She's getting academically recruited by some schools for graduate school, which is great. If Matthew continues to be interested in that path, I would expect the same thing for him. When they do start graduate school, they're going to be a leg up on the competition."

McDonough said it was around the eighth grade that he realized science was the path he wanted to take. While he doesn't have a specific area he wants to focus on, McDonough said working in the lab with bacteria and viruses "is really fascinating to me."

While applying, McDonough was

given a list of HHMI participating scientists along with their current projects. He chose the five projects he is most interested in working on this summer and is waiting to see where he will be placed.

"Doing research of this type is what I want to do for the rest of my life," McDonough said. "I'm just kind of getting more into it, and working one-on-one with a prominent scientist is what I hope to get out of (this experience)."

To have a second student chosen for EXROP in the two years WCU has been involved with SEA-Phages shows that the university is on HHMI's radar, Wallen said.

"We've got a great relationship with a lot of faculty that are part of the HHMI SEA-Phages program," Wallen said. "This is only strengthening that, sending quality students their way. I think it's a great impact to build this relationship that we have with HHMI right now. We want to run the SEA-Phages program for years. We want to keep sending Western students that way."

McDonough will spend 10 weeks of full-time research with his assigned scientist. In addition to conducting research, he will attend two meetings at HHMI's headquarters in Chevy Chase, Maryland, to present his research in a poster session.



Scotty wakes up every morning prepared for work, helping one specific person around the campus of Western Carolina University. He stays by his charge's side in order to guide her where she needs to go, as his charge has lost her ability to see. Every day he does this, and every day he comes home satisfied with helping another in the world. Scotty will keep this job for a great deal of his life, but he would never think of changing unless he was not doing a good enough job, as he is the textbook definition of loyal. He is a fellow with a mission, and he refuses to quit unless it is absolutely necessary. He will continue to wake up and go out happy, tail wagging all the while.


Scotty is a service dog currently living with Crystal Plemmons, a full time student of Western Carolina University who is currently working for her English literature bachelor's degree, and also spends time teaching other students as a writing tutor. She is married with a son, and she will be teaching English 101 next year. After she graduates in 2018 she wants to work at a community college. Crystal met Scotty in May of 2015, when he was

only a puppy of nineteen months, and with only several weeks of training. Crystal described the role of both beings involved as a partnership, one where both have to contribute or else nothing will come from the work they do. Crystal still needs to know the location of her destination, directing Scotty with clear directions. Without proper instruction Scotty cannot do his job, which is why both animal and human go through the training together.

Most people have difficulty recognizing that service animals are not pets. They are not supposed to get any attention from others, no petting or fawning. This is why service animals often wear a vest instructing passers-by not to touch or pet the dog. They have a job to do, and interrupting that job is just like interrupting anyone who is busy; it is rude and irresponsible. It is akin to stopping a nurse or doctor from taking care of their patient. The life of a service animal is one of duty, protecting and guiding their master wherever they are needed. Of course, it's not a lifelong job. Most service animals work for a decade before

retiring, stopping their work to live their lives, enjoy the time they still have, and generally just be a happy pet. To continue working after a decade of service would be cruel, though there are more logical reasons for this decision. After so many years a dog may be getting slower, less responsive, and more importantly, less happy. Many people retire their service animals when the dogs start to lose that spark that kept them excited to work every day. When a service animal retires, it can have several options, but not always. Sometimes the program that provided the animal requires them to be given back, but often the service animal can stay with their partner. In the event of the former, the service animal is sent to a new home, sometimes even back to the one who raised them as a puppy in the beginning of their career. Scotty is most likely not going to be sent back however, as he does his job with an impressive amount of control. He does his job well and with dedication, happy with his charge and happy with his life.





# CELEBRATING CULTURE

Hannah Cothren

When most think of research they contrive visions of lab coats, beakers and flasks, or Petri dishes. If this is the benchmark for research, then junior English major Alli Rios and English professor Dr. Paul Worley's process was in stark contrast to this idea.

Culture is not quantifiable; it does not exist within numbers and figures calling for an atypical type of study: living research. Rios conducted this "living research" through the Summer Undergraduate Research Program with the Honors College of WCU. "In the beginning," Rios said "it was a lot of reading and learning about Maya culture and Mexican history." Within six months she travelled to Mexico, the birthplace of Maya culture.

Rios became involved with "The Language of Weaving" project after Dr. Worley emailed her seeking a research assistant. "The opportunity seemed too incredible to pass up!" Rios says

The word "Maya" conjures images of lofty stone temples and cryptic calendars in luscious Mexico three thousand miles away from Cullowhee. However, here in Western North Carolina there is a population of Maya brought here in escape of persecution and with promises of work. The premise behind Dr. Worley's research was to bring awareness and appreciation to this unique culture that exists in the area through several exhibits throughout Western North Carolina.

To do this the pair travelled to Maya populations in Morganton, NC to speak with community elders and as many individuals as possible. It was crucial to ensure the involvement of the indigenous peoples: after all, the exhibits featured their work.

The tradition of handwoven Maya textiles is centuries old and teeming with generations of history and heritage. "Textiles have been created

in the same manner they have been created since before the Americas were colonized" Rios muses. The lexicon of the textiles challenges western concepts of language; each pattern holds meaning like each word of the English language and like the English language these woven words are dynamic. Over thousands of years, some have kept the same connotations and some have evolved to carry new meanings. Even today, new patterns are being created by contemporary Maya. Women spend months and months weaving these intricate fabrics into huipiles, conventional blouse-like garments worn by the women. Each are unique to the pueblos or towns. "You can walk down the street of Mexico and tell by a woman's blouse what town they come from." Despite the complex and varied embroidery of the fabric there is a common thread woven into each garment-the Popol Vuh, their unifying, sacred text.

Following North Carolina the pair travelled to Mexico to meet the people they had been reading about and to speak with the women who created the textiles. They also held the intention to purchase their weavings to showcase in the exhibits. "I'm not even sure how to describe the experience, the women were so nice," Rios says, speaking of their experience. They travelled to several pueblos meeting women in churches and one-roomed houses. One of Rios' favorite memories was drinking coffee and having lunch with Maya women gathered around a table outside of their home.

In the end this project is about recognizing and celebrating a culture. "We really wanted to make sure that people realized these indigenous people are important, and it's not something that's an entire country away" Rios said. It was also about personal growth for Alli. "I'm much more interested in what's going on in the world," she said "I'm more willing to step out of my comfort zone and learn more about it."



# Making the World a Better Place for Animals

Ashton Cannon



For most of her life, senior Elissa Nelson had two passions: riding and training horses, and pursuing a career as a veterinarian. But when a riding accident temporarily paralyzed her a few years ago, Nelson realized she had a choice to make. As much as she loved riding, she couldn't risk ending up in a wheelchair and losing her dream of practicing large animal veterinary medicine. She made the tough decision to give up riding for the sake of her future career. However, she didn't give up horses completely. Nelson currently serves as president of WCU's Equestrian Club.

Her love of horses also led to her greatest adventure so far, a summer volunteering in Nicaragua and Thailand with World Vets International Aid for Animals. World Vets International Veterinary Medicine (IVM) Program held in Granada, Nicaragua, is a surgical and veterinary training program for veterinary, pre-veterinary, and technician students who want to gain clinical and practical veterinary experience. In Nicaragua, Nelson worked with many other veterinarians whose mission was to improve the health of work horses used by indigenous people. Nelson's favorite memory of Nicaragua involves teaching a local farmer how to use a hoof pick for the first time. When she realized her Spanish was not as good as she'd thought, she got creative and showed him with some makeshift sign language. "That's when I realized," she said, "what I want to do as a vet is educate. It is possible to do even when you cannot understand one another."

From Nicaragua, Nelson traveled to an elephant reserve in Chiang Mai, Thailand for a one-week elephant medicine and conservation project. The elephants have been rescued from a variety of situations including logging operations, elephant-riding camps, and inhumane working conditions. "Many of the elephants were worked nearly to death, had their young taken from them,



were injured by land mines, or were brutally trained to be used for human entertainment using a form of torture called Phajaan (crushing)," Nelson said. Euthanasia of injured animals is not practiced in Thailand because of religious beliefs, which meant

there were plenty of patients for Nelson to help. One case that stuck with her was an elderly female elephant that had walked over a landmine and had a big portion of

her foot blown off. "After being in Thailand for a while and interacting with these gentle giants at Elephant Nature Park, I have learned just how much we have to learn as humans. Despite the physical and emotional

pain these animals have endured at the hands of humans, they forgive."

Nelson's love for animals is clear; she even confessed that often she would greet a person's pet before acknowledging its owner. And while putting her serving hands into gear helping animals, she got to experience the cultures of two unique corners of the earth and discovered a new passion for travel. "I love North Carolina," she said. "I would never live anywhere else, but there is so much out there. I swear, I was born with wanderlust."

Between coursework as a Biology and Chemistry double major, leadership of the Equestrian Club, and responsibilities as president of the Honors College Board of Directors, Nelson finds very little time for one of her favorite activities, hanging out in her ENO in Lake Glenville, enjoying the lake and mountains. Her ENO may get dusty after she graduates in Spring 2017, though, because in the fall she plans to start veterinary school, where she'll be one step closer to achieving her dream of becoming a large animal vet and making the world a better place for animals.

**"Despite the physical and emotional pain these animals have endured at the hands of humans, they forgive."**

**-Elissa Nelson**



# Whee Vote

LYDIA SHELLEY

Junior year is an incredibly busy time for any college student, but transfer student and social work major Joanna Woodson is taking on a lot more than just her academic responsibilities. Woodson heads up Western Carolina's Student Democracy Coalition, not a position to be taken lightly, especially during 2016's heated election season. "Organizing volunteers to try and push students to vote, to have conversations about why the vote matters, that has been very stressful," she says. "Planning events and getting marketing designed and placed has also been very time consuming, but in the end it is all exciting and it is so worth it." That kind of positivity is characteristic of Woodson. Her humility is also amazing considering

what she has achieved for the voters on Western's campus. Woodson has worked with the Andrew Goodman Foundation (a program that helps college students get involved in the political process) and was even recognized as one of the foundation's six Hidden Heroes of 2016 for her leadership. She was also selected for a Community Impact award by North Carolina Campus Compact for her efforts registering students to vote in the primaries this March, which raised the percentage of voter turnout on Western's campus higher than that of the state population. That's no mean feat, and Woodson—who describes herself as "high energy" and unwilling to take no for an answer—isn't stopping there.

## HOW JOANNA WOODSON AND THE STUDENT DEMOCRACY COALITION ARE CHANGING THE WAY WESTERN STUDENTS TAKE PART IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

**L.S.** WHEN DID YOU FIRST BECOME INVOLVED IN POLITICS?

**J.W.** I have been politically active since high school, but justice was always more of an abstract idea for me. However, while I was out of school I got sick and experienced what the United States healthcare system looks like from the inside. I visited three different hospitals while sick and my experience traumatized me. I realized just how dysfunctional the U.S. is because of how little we care about our sick. Everything I do now, including my passion for getting students to understand why their vote and voice is so important, is driven by the desire to be some part of change within the system.

**L.S.** HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH THE STUDENT DEMOCRACY COALITION?

**J.W.** The Andrew Goodman Foundation came to campus in January of this year, and I happened to hear about the internship. We named our whole team the Student Democracy Coalition. I am the team leader, which just means I try and keep everyone motivated, energized, and organized, but we couldn't have worked better together.

**L.S.** IS IT DIFFICULT TO BE INVOLVED IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS ON A COLLEGE CAMPUS?

**J.W.** We generally get a lot of push back from students who do not believe their vote counts or their voice matters, and that hurts. I want to take everything I have learned through this process and give it to them on a flash drive, but of course that is impossible. The best we can do is encourage students to have a conversation with us, and hope for the best. Since we are a nonpartisan group, it has been easier to avoid the animosity of the two major campaigns this year.

**L.S.** WHY DO YOU BELIEVE VOTING IS IMPORTANT?

**J.W.** I have been given the opportunity to have one on one conversations with civil rights giants, such as Clarence Jones, Martin Luther King Jr.'s attorney and confidant. I have also met a diverse array of students who are still affected by the same struggles that people have been facing for the past decades. The more I learn, the more I realize that we are still so very close to the 1960s—yes, a lot has changed, but I think not as much as we would like to believe. People died for the vote; people also spend hundreds of millions of dollars to sway our vote, so with those two things in mind, I think it's worth noting how valuable our voices are.

**L.S.** DO YOU SEE PROGRESS AMONG STUDENT VOTERS AT WESTERN?

**J.W.** More than anything I think people are encouraged to voice their opinions more, and hopefully challenge themselves. Everywhere I go I hear conversations taking place, sometimes students are in agreement of what should happen post-election, and sometimes they are arguing about whether voting is necessary. Regardless, I think conversation is healthy.

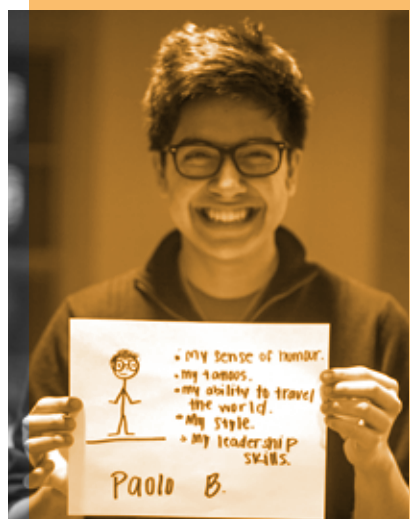




# THROUGH THE EYES OF AN RA

MARIBETH DOCKERY

You step out of the car on move-in day, take the piles of things out of your trunk and backseat, gather them all together in a cart, and get your room key. Walking through the hall, someone wearing a name tag stops you to hand you the massive bag of clothes you didn't notice you dropped. That person is your Resident Assistant (RA). They help guide you through college, answer questions you may have, and are there for you when you need advice. They may seem like they have simple jobs, but what does being an RA really entail?



Adam Lytle, an RA in Balsam, is a sophomore here at WCU. As an accounting major and English minor, he tends to have a lot of homework. He says that he has “a moderately demanding job” with a lot of residents to get to know and help. Adam also has a lot to do with the Honors College. His weekly schedule is packed. His days usually go from about seven a.m. to midnight, depending on how much homework he has to do and if he was on duty. One of his responsibilities as an RA is being in the RA office between 8 p.m. and midnight on certain days throughout the week. He says he has little free time and that naps are highly valuable.

There are a few differences in being an RA in the Honors College dorms and the non-Honors College dorms. For example, Adam has almost double the number of residents as an RA in Scott or Walker, the main freshman dorms. RAs in these other dorms have around twenty or twenty-five residents while Adam has around fifty-six. Just because Adam has double the number of people to look after, it doesn't necessarily mean that he has double the work. Adam's residents are not all freshmen. Of the fifty-six

students he looks after, only about half are freshmen. These freshmen seem to be very self-sufficient and do not always need him other than to ask a few minor questions. He has only had a few small issues, like minor roommate disagreements, come up with residents that he needed to help resolve, whereas RAs in other dorms already had numerous disputes the first week of classes.

Being an RA involves social life on a large scale. RAs have to be social with residents at certain points- during SSI's (student assessments) and programs especially. Their jobs also have an effect on their social lives with their friends. He says that he has become more social this year because of his job. He thinks that being an RA involves being social and friendly. While RAs are not supposed to be their residents' best friends, but rather mentors, Adam thinks that you can be friendly with your residents while still maintaining a level of professionalism. He likes to make his residents feel welcome and involved. He likes to ask their opinions on programs he is thinking about having so that he can see what they think and how many students might be interested in what he is thinking of doing.

What makes Adam so special, though? Adam takes the time to get to know his residents. One student said, “Adam is really friendly. He takes the time to ask everyone he sees how their day has been. I think he's a lot more caring than some RA's. Some RA's don't even bother looking at their residents when they see them in the hall. Even when they aren't Adam's residents, he still makes the effort to make them feel welcome on his halls.”

Adam's advice to students who would like to be RAs in the future is simple: don't wait until the last minute to do your obligations, don't limit yourself to just your own residents, have interesting names for programs you are required to create, rely on other RAs, and always have candy in your room. Being an RA has its perks, but it is also a job that takes commitment and responsibility, so waiting until the last minute to do things isn't always the best option. When you are on duty, you see residents from all over the building. They may ask you questions, ask for help, or want to start a friendly conversation. Sometimes it's just a quick, “Hey, how are you?”, and sometimes it's a little bit of a longer conversation. As an RA, you should try to make all residents feel like they



should be able to ask you for help or advice when their RA is not available. Something RAs have to do are programs. They bring students together and allow them to get to know one another and make some new friends. Sometimes the programs are very boring, but marketing them with an interesting name will get more people to come. Being an RA is hard to do alone, so having other RAs in the building that you are friends with can be helpful, especially when you

get swamped with homework and need a night off from duty to finish it all. The candy? Well, Adam really likes gummies, as do his residents.

Being an RA is a culmination of a lot of different aspects all rolled into one. A lot of things change when you become an RA. Though the job seems demanding and sometimes daunting, it is a job that Adam recommends to other students who are willing to put in the work to help other students.



# カルチャーショック

## (Culture Shock)

By Nathaniel Evans

Pack your bags, grab a ride to the airport, make your way through customs, and sit down for a sixteen-hour flight to the other side of the world. Arriving at your destination, take in the advertisements, which you can barely read, and the people all around you who don't look the same as you. Why? Because you are a college exchange student who has just arrived in a different country, on another continent, with a different language. If you can imagine that, then you're well on your way to understanding the shock that Japanese exchange students experience in their first few days in the United States.

This year at Western Carolina University, we have ten exchange students from all over Japan. These students have made that long flight to spend a semester or two learning in Western's relaxing and peaceful atmosphere, free from the daily distractions in the rushed life of Japan.

Coming from Japan to America is a huge change. Japanese Exchange students Kanako Hata and Moe Tamaki indicated that the only resounding constant between America and Japan is the technology. Both countries rely greatly on different devices to drive the daily lifestyle, and use them in the same way. But really, that's where the differences, and the Culture Shock, begin.

In Japan, being modest and humble are high orders of society. Greetings require a courteous response, and

extra attachments to statements and phrases are meant to show respect to people who are at a higher rank than you, or people you don't know. Adding "gozaimasu" (go-za-e-mas) to the end of "thank you," or "good morning," makes the phrases polite. The Japanese also don't allow conversations to end without expressing interest in the subject, as it is seen as impolite. Instead you add "I see," or "is that so," to show that you understood what the other person was saying, or that you want to hear more. Going from Japan to America can be such a rude awakening because of this. Here, conversations are cut short, many greetings are a simple nod of the head, and no one regards others as their betters in most day to day interactions, throwing politeness and humility out the window more often than not.

Food is also very different. In the words of Kanako Hata: "American food contains a lot of fat, and there is a lot." A Japanese diet consists mostly of fish and rice, supplemented by fruits and vegetables in very small portions that are usually not finished. An American diet is mostly red meat, grains, and dairy in largely over-sized portions. This leads the Japanese to often be much healthier than most, especially Americans. That's probably why they have the saying, "A Japanese woman grows neither old nor fat."

The differences even extend into school life. At home in Japan, Kanako Hata's daily commute to school is

almost two hours by train, while every American is within driving distance of the school they attend (around thirty minutes), or living on campus if they're too far away. The classrooms even work differently. In Japan, class time consists of sitting quietly in your seat, taking notes while the teacher lectures. The difference in America, which both Kanako and Moe agreed on, is that students are encouraged to speak up in class with their thoughts and opinions.

So why visit somewhere so different, and how do you adjust to the shock that comes with being immersed in a new culture? That varies for each person. For Kanako, it is holding onto small habits, such as using the traditional Japanese saying "itadakimasu," (e-ta-da-ki-mas before eating, and "gochisoosama," after eating (go-chi-so-sah-ma) which both mean "thank you for the meal." Moe, however, has more easily adjusted to American culture, and in attempting to adopt it, says that she is trying to express her opinion more often. On top of that, she is also enjoying the food, saying, "when I first came here, I didn't miss Japanese food because I really like pizza and hamburgers." It also helps that both are really attempting to understand how Americans do things in the classroom so they can use that to their advantage when they return to Japan to teach English to Elementary and Junior High Japanese students.

Both Kanako and Moe have enjoyed their time at Western, learning more



about life here each day. Both said they would recommend America, but specifically Western, to their friends looking to study abroad, as "people are very kind to [them] here." Kanako even recommends it because the quiet countryside provides a relaxing area to study with little to no distractions, and a lot of free time. That is vastly different from her average day in Japan which consists of waking up at 5 AM for classes, and working two jobs, leaving little room for relaxation.

It's one thing to move from one state to the next, or across a country, but to spend five months of your life in a new continent, being constantly bombarded by vastly differing social norms is difficult. Perhaps the secret is to slow down and adjust at your own pace, like Kanako. Conversely, maybe it's to get out, make new friends, and experience new things such as football, like Moe-which she finds extremely enjoyable. While it may be difficult coming to a new place with new sensations to experience, even when it's hard just to

read and speak, that pressure can ease as a person changes to fit the area. You can develop into a better person with amazing skills to show off when you return home from the changes you undergo. Be like Kanako and Moe, and don't let a little Culture Shock deter you from an amazing experience.



# NANTAHALA GUIDE

## BY ALLIE PRATT

Standing above the daunting flush of water known as Nantahala Falls, watching the curl and crash of the powerful Class III rapid, you know for a fact this is the start of the craziest thing you have ever done. With a tightened jaw and a nervous joke, you climb into the boat with your guests. Your job is to act like it's nothing, to be so confident in the few things that could go right that your guests don't have time to worry about what could go wrong. In the current sweeping you toward a perfect splash, time begins to slow and you brace for the impact of a successful falls run.

This is how Nick Crocker, a junior Parks and Recreation Management major, spent the past two summers, serving as a guide for Carolina Outfitters on the Nantahala. The internship with Carolina Outfitters

was an important step in his career path because he earned course credit and gained valuable experience and on-the-job training. Crocker says he also had a lot of fun taking "custies" (customers) down the river and meeting new people.

Nestled within the center of the Nantahala National Forest is the Nantahala River Gorge. Here in the heart of the forest lives the Nantahala River, a dam-controlled river that hosts thousands of rafters and kayakers every year from April to October. The Nantahala River descends from Nantahala Lake through Duke Energy's Nantahala Power Plant. The water exiting the plant from the bottom of the 250-foot-tall dam is a brisk 48 to 52 degrees year round. Running at a standard of 650-700 CFS (cubic feet of water per second), the river is used by commercial outfitters and

private boaters for rafting, kayaking, and fishing.

A normal day for Nick included inflating and loading rafts as well as taking boaters down the river. Since there are usually more than ten guides at the outpost daily, a rotation list is created, giving rafting priority to experienced guides with "trip leader" status. When customers are brought up to the raft barn they are outfitted with a flotation device, given a paddle, and prepped with a safety speech before they are taken to the commercial put-in. While on the river Nick was in charge of instructing guests and throwing in bad jokes to distract from the brisk water.

"I would recommend being a guide to anyone who wants to have a good time and meet new people," said Nick as he spoke of how beneficial being a guide has been to his undergraduate experience at Western.

# MARKETING CHRISTMAS CONNECTION

By Hailey Eidse

One bright, crisp, early morning a child runs to the living room- way too early for anyone else to be awake. Filled with excitement and immense joy, the child looks around and sees all the presents under the tree. It is Christmas morning. Normally this child would not have very many presents under the tree. The parents would never be able to afford what their child wished for. This family is one of many who live in Jackson County, North Carolina. In Jackson County about 1 in 4 children fall under the poverty line each year. Christmas Connection is a non-profit organization in Jackson County that provides presents for children and teenagers who fall under the poverty line and whose parents cannot afford gifts. This year, the Facebook Generation Marketing class (MKT 195) is doing what they can to make a difference in their community. They are not only creating a Facebook page for Christmas Connection but have also worked really hard on creating a website to help raise awareness.

Christmas Connection of Jackson County is trying to raise \$110,000 towards the purpose of spreading the holiday joy. This group has been around for 27 years and usually is able to give \$75 worth of presents to each child in need. This could include brand new clothes, toys, books, shoes, and so much more.

They are a nonprofit and get all of their help through donations and volunteers. Before the MKT 195 class got involved, there was no website and a non-active Facebook page. Without the help of this class, raising the goal amount would have been terribly hard to do. One of the heads of Christmas Connection reached out to the professor of the class, Dr. Julie Johnson-Busbin

The MKT 195 class is hard at work doing everything to get Christmas Connections social media up and running. "We want to be able to give them a start and hand it off in December so that they can use it" says Dr. Johnson-Busbin. They are doing just about everything that involves the creation of a website and social media pages. Certain people are working on design, while others work on the more internal website work, and then additional work is very specific, like what freshman, Jordan Strickland does. She is majoring in computer information systems and is working specifically on the donation page right now.

In this class, every little contribution counts. When talking to the people in this class, one can really tell how much these students truly care about what they are doing here. It even inspires them to go out into the world and help. Talking about the experience, Strickland talks about

how much this class inspires her to gain more experience to go out into the world and help other businesses in the future. Another student, Hannah Noel says, "I've done other volunteer work before, but nothing to this extent. I knew it was going to be a lot of work, but I realized how important it was because they can't do it all by themselves." This class goes above and beyond when working with this organization. Creating the website and social media pages are only a part of what they do. They also have created and run events like the Teddy Bear Toss at a home basketball game as well as a percentage night at Zaxby's to raise money and awareness to try and help the organization as much as possible.

Christmas Connection is going to raise the money that they need with the help of Western Carolina's MKT 195 class. Dr. Johnson-Busbin talks about how marketing is an art that is very hands on. She says that you just have to see what works and what doesn't and then go from there. Brainstorming and collaborating to make everything look and run better and this is truly what this class is all about. Creating a website from scratch and rebuilding social media pages is what is really going to change Christmas Connection in such a great way. It is such an inspiration to see a group of people so involved in the community.



# Brexit to Trump:

## Uncertainty as the New Normal

By: Ben Huffman

With a flowery dress and loud, clicking cowboy boots, there would be no reason to suspect she was any different than any other American. That is of course until she starts talking. Katie, an American Studies major, is a foreign exchange student from the University of Portsmouth, in Great Britain. She came to America at a time where uncertainty plagued day-to-day life and the thought of a new leader for the country was at the forefront of Americans' minds. But for her, it was not much different from how life had been right before she left. The idea of uncertainty had slowly become normal.

In June 2016, the United Kingdom held a vote to determine whether they should leave the European Union (EU). "I felt we should have remained in the EU," Katie said. "I was about to come to America. I knew that, even if temporary, the economic instability would not be good for me when I was about to transfer a large sum of money into dollars." With the market volatile, Katie knew there would be some heavy repercussions to leaving and it was the exchange rate between the United States and the United Kingdom that would take a large hit.

Ultimately, the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU, a decision that few had thought would actually come. When she woke up the next morning, the decision came as a surprise to her. "I guess in some ways it was personal," Katie said. "It's my future on the line and currently the EU was good for us so I was happy to stay there for now." With the final vote at 52 percent wanting to leave to the 48 percent to stay, Brexit had become a reality.

Meanwhile, Katie had her eyes on a spectacle just as large across the pond. The United States Presidential Election had become a world-wide show, and as an American Studies major, she was very intrigued by what would happen with the United States. "I was following it pretty

closely," Katie said. "It didn't really pick up speed until I came out here,

but I was aware of everything." With her eye closely glued to the election as she made her way over, she could not fully understand just how important both votes were to their respective countries. One could cause some major damage to the economy, the other, the history in the making.

As was the case for most Americans, Katie wasn't quite sure how she felt about either of the candidates at first glance. But she admits this factor is in part due to how different the American and British political systems are, citing their opinions on gun laws as an example. "Our [Great Britain's] political opinions sit very much to the Democrat side of the scale," she admits. "We just don't think the same about the same sort of issues." One issue in particular she talked about was the issue with guns. The difference in the two systems made it harder for her to wrap her head around who she would support.

Another big difference Katie noticed about the American system was the low impact of third-party candidates. "If people felt like voting for a third party would count for anything," she said. "I think this place [the United States] would go for an independent candidate." While America is basically a two-party system, Britain has many parties whose candidates have a legitimate shot at winning their elections. Katie argues that the independent candidates should be taken just as seriously, though she understands that due to the captivating nature of the major parties, they are unable to get their fair share.

Though she is unable to vote, Katie admits it has been fun seeing how the campus reacts to the election. "All the chalk on the pavement around here, especially in the lead up to the election," Katie said, "it's really interesting to see it's just everywhere." The creativity of the student body in voicing their opinions piqued her interest and she noted that in Portsmouth, most of the voiced opinion is in graffiti and you would get in trouble for it.

Being on two different sides of the Atlantic for two important votes was important for Katie, and not something she could ever forget. In a way, she says, the results of the Brexit vote are like the presidential election; both are major events that present uncertainty about what the future holds, which makes people uncomfortable. Still, Katie feels like she was a part of something special. "I was on the receiving end of two significant historical events here," she says laughing. "It's something I'm going to be able to tell my grandchildren about one day." In the face of these historical events, she advises people everywhere to remain calm. "Whatever damage was going to be done has been done," she insists. "We just have to persevere, go forward with it, and make the best of the situation."





# BEATING THE ODDS

Sean Anderson

“We grew up really poor, and I had seven younger siblings,” There wasn’t money left over for anything more than necessities, and with eleven mouths to feed, the necessities really stack up quick. Money came slow and went fast; without persistence, this might have been all freshman William Towery could look forward to in life. He pulled the odds a little more in his favor by working several jobs through high school with good grades. Some weeks, three or four hours of sleep per day was normal. Through extraordinary efforts to support himself and assistance through scholarships and funds, William is the first of his family to make it in to college. He won’t let his opportunity slip; he has his mind set on law school.

Before his arrival at Western this fall Will Towery’s life was anything but stable. He grew up in a mentally and physically abusive environment with a family plagued by struggles with drug abuse, food insecurity, and homelessness. On top of all that, Will had issues with the formation of his feet as he grew and endured seven major corrective surgeries. Consequently, he had to relearn how to walk at three different points in his life. Despite all of these disadvantages, Will refused to be pulled from the path to success. If anything, the added difficulties only caused his passion to burn brighter. He worked long hours, studied hard, and followed through on every opportunity available. Being admitted to Western was only the first step; he’s looking onward to law school to secure a good future for himself and his family.

The drive to succeed really ignited for Will during high school in two classes

he never expected to like. He had hated middle school Spanish, but in high school, a better teacher helped him discover that he possessed a natural affinity for learning foreign languages. Will excelled in every Spanish class available to him at the high school, then, during his senior year, continued with informal private lessons hosted by his teacher and the school librarian during his lunch hour. The discovery of a college-level American Sign Language class branched his foreign language studies down another path. His expertise in foreign language concepts allowed easy pick-up on ASL concepts. His interest in deaf culture stemmed from his classes’ involvement in the surrounding deaf community. His fluency in two foreign languages will increase his potential value as a criminal attorney, and he may also use these skills to find employment related to foreign language during law school.

Will never intended to take a criminal justice class in high school, either, but fate intervened. “I actually got stuck,” he said, “with a class that was a third back-up choice on my schedule, and it was criminal justice.” His teacher brought a life of experience and passion in criminal justice to the classroom, which really inspired Will; he quickly became infatuated with the nature of law; it was organized, respectable, defined-- the polar opposite of his tumultuous early life. Using set rules and precedents to make an argument became a new passion for Will, and he hasn’t considered a life without law since. Will’s course

of study during his undergraduate years will earn him majors in Spanish and Criminal Justice (Pre-Law) with minors in Emergency Disaster Management and a pre-approved Pre-Law program. In addition to his busy academic schedule, he also serves as president of the Residential Hall Council for both Balsam and Blue Ridge, does volunteer work for WCU’s Center for Service Learning, plans to study abroad in Argentina or Spain to improve his Spanish, works approximately twenty-four hours per week at Panda Express and Burger Studio as a food service worker, and is considering a future position as a Resident Assistant. This all keeps him very busy, but it also allows him to be very competitive in the race for acceptance to a prestigious law school, which could in turn land him a job or internship with a well-known law firm and jumpstart his career. To some, this workload would be unbearable; however, his method for coping is simple: “Compartmentalize it; time for work, time for school, time for family, time for fun. Don’t worry, and just focus on whatever you’re doing at the time.”

Will has suffered an array of disadvantages, but he has created for himself a network of advantages that allow him to soar well above the sea of trouble that, ten years ago, everyone assumed would drown his aspirations. He proved that he has what it takes to overcome enormous odds; now he just needs to keep driving down this road that he has chosen for himself. His exit: successful tri-lingual attorney.







# LIKE FATHER LIKE DAUGHTER: A 3,000-MILE LEGACY

By Joseph Dakota Taylor

Adriana Villarroel is part of a legacy that is over 3,000 miles wide. She remembered staring up at the giant clock tower when she was five years old, and even now she feels that she is only a little girl starting on a grand adventure. The tower was a gate to her past and her future, and she knew it was part of her home. She would constantly strive to uphold her legacy, just as her father before her.

Lionel Villarroel's passion for geology was the reason he discovered WCU. He graduated in 1986 from la Universidad Tomas Frias, majoring in Geology, working for an assortment of geology companies afterwards. One geological project introduced him to Jerry Miller, a professor of Geology at WCU, and quickly became lifelong friends. Miller told Lionel about the geology program

at Western, and out of a drive to get his masters in a geology degree, Lionel and his family moved to Sylva, North Carolina in 2003.

Adriana Villarroel is only the second Bolivian to attend Western Carolina University. Her father, Lionel Villarroel, who graduated in 2005, was the first in the legacy.

Adriana was only five years old at the time of the move from Bolivia, and this started her exposure to both Sylva, North Carolina and La Paz, Bolivia. Being raised in a completely different country does make for a difficult case in adjusting to life in America, but for Adriana, she had a taste of both American and Latin culture growing up. In a Latino family and a Latin country, life was not exactly easy for Adriana, especially having to move back and forth from Sylva to La Paz

(about every two to three years). With parents that pushed her to be the best she can be, and with the extremely rigid Bolivian school system, she was pushed to do well and praised for what successes she may have. However, the American influence did even that out, with a less strict school system, but her parents continued to push her for success. With this dual culture background, both Spanish and English came easily to her, and coupled with the pressure of living up to her parents' expectations and having knowledge of both La Paz and Sylva, college would tend to be easier for her, rather than someone who coasts on by school and has no drive to succeed. Although the culture barrier was a great challenge at first, Adriana quickly became accustomed to life both in America and Bolivia.

Bolivian culture is very tight knit, with a lot of value being placed onto family. The legacy that Lionel Villarroel started proves this worth, and it means just as much for Adriana to pass it down. What drives her for success in college is not just the good work ethic instilled by her upbringing, but the determination to provide a positive image of where she is from. There are not a lot of Bolivians in Western North Carolina, so Adriana feels it is her duty to uphold not only her family name, but her culture as well, "I have to say it's definitely kind of an honor," Adriana comments when asked about her feelings on going to the same school as her father, "Being the second one [Bolivian] to ever attend Western is definitely something I didn't expect. If anything, I would've expected more people to come over the years." This pride is also evident in her parents as well, as they expect the best from her, and this Legacy will be another way to prove that the Villarroels are a hard-working, honorable family. In doing so, not only does Adriana carry on her own legacy, but she uses her legacy to build upon the legacies of her parents.

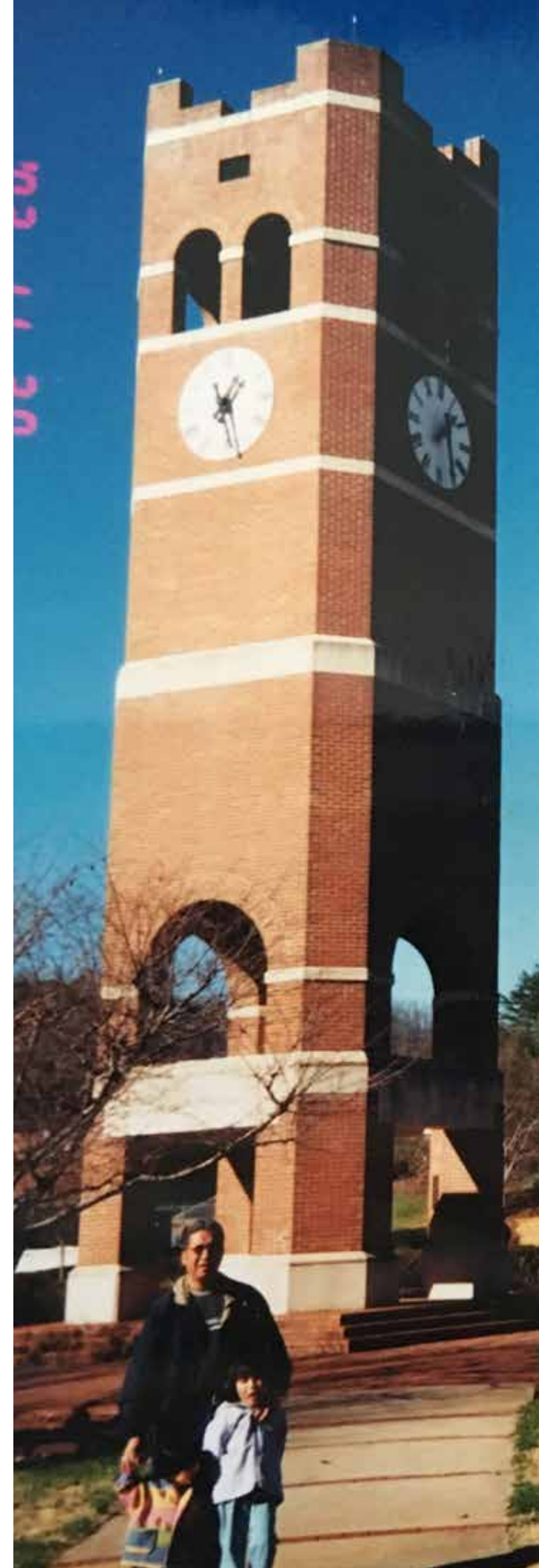
**"Being the second [Bolivian] to ever attend Western is definitely something I didn't expect."**

**-Adriana Villarroel**

As a legacy student, Adriana Villarroel establishes the fact that one can really find most walks of life in the college experience. But will this legacy that started with her father continue? "Of course, I'll support them [her children] wherever they wish to go, but if they could go to Western, it'd be something I'd very much be proud of," Adriana says, getting emotional. While Adriana does want to continue her proud heritage, she does state that she will support her kids no matter what. So, this legacy could go on for another generation, or could die out with her graduation in 2020.

Ever since Adriana was little, she has shown a proficiency and love for both Math and Chemistry, so she strived to find a career that implements these two skills. She plans to follow her mother's footsteps into the realm of pharmacy, building yet another legacy into her family. She plans to carry this role into Chapel Hill Pharmacy School, and then build a business from the selling of pharmaceutical goods.

Whether the legacy may continue is a mystery, but rest assured the world will be curious to see what impact another Villarroel will make upon the campus of Western Carolina.







# LIKE MOTHER LIKE SON

BY: ETHAN LEATHERMAN

It is just another ordinary day, you come into work and start your shift with a bit of a sigh knowing what comes next, and as you go through the motions you end up meeting an age-old foe, the top shelf, and try to get a box off it when suddenly the box slips and falls on you. This is what happened to Angelia Leatherman, 50-year-old mother of three and a nontraditional student at Western Carolina University, almost five years ago when she worked as a CNA at Murphy Medical Center. She ended up with a debilitating injury that meant she could not lift over fifteen pounds, a requirement of her job, and she was fired. For many people this may have meant moving on to another service job, but to Leatherman this was a wakeup call, and she applied to school at Tri-County Community College to finally go for her dream job as a child psychologist.

There were many obstacles when she first started, including a lack of confidence. "I did not think I was very intelligent at the time," Leatherman said, "and was very worried that I would not be able to succeed in this environment." With the help of her professors at Tri-County Leatherman learned that not only was she intelligent, she could thrive in an academic environment. During her time at Tri-County she was inducted into Phi Theta Kappa, the National Technical Honor Society, and the Tau Upsilon Alpha National Organization for Human Services Honor Society.

After Earning an associate's degree in 2014 at Tri-county she decided to transfer her credits to Western Carolina University, further her education and began a two-year journey in Western's Psychology and Sociology Departments. Her prowess at social networking with

both the internet and face-to-face encounters, she raised her profile in the department which led to her current position as the SNT coordinator for The National Society of Leadership and Success at in the local chapter at the WCU. While it may seem strange that a fifty-year-old has become a master of social networking, her philosophy is, "I have found that people are people and that age is not going to affect you if you look at it positively and you try to learn." A perfect example of her prowess in social networking can be seen every time she walks around campus. I have noted that people will stop everything they are doing just to talk to her, and this can last for about thirty minutes or more depending on if someone else recognizes her and starts the cycle all over again. But when it comes down to it, her skills at social networking are a true reflection of her skill and love of sociology and psychology. From a young age, she tried to understand and help people, and has grown to love children the most, with children being the entire reason Angelia got married.

When it comes to relationships there are none more interesting than that of her family, more specifically her son. You see, her son is a freshman at Western who is currently part The Honors College and lives on campus. The interesting part is their relationship, with them having less time to interact while attending the same school no less, but they still stay connected and will often go for lunch or shopping just to stay in contact. Of course, seeing a mother and son interacting at a college level is nothing new, but it is fascinating how going to the same school has made them more distant to one another but still maintaining a bond with weekly visits and outings. Of

course, her son is ultimately very proud of his mother coming so far after such a long climb in the educational system, and she too is proud of him for making it to college and overcoming his past relationship with his biological mother. And in the end, that is all you can hope for, that when you go away from home you will still stay connected to those that matter to you. And the name of her son at Western is Ethan Leatherman, a writer for Imagine magazine.

**"I HAVE FOUND THAT PEOPLE ARE PEOPLE AND THAT AGE IS NOT GOING TO AFFECT YOU IF YOU LOOK AT IT POSITIVELY AND YOU TRY TO LEARN"**

**-ANGELIA LEATHERMAN**

Angelia is someone who worked for nearly twenty-five years because she wanted to support her children but since she could not she decided to keep persevering and try to achieve her dream. As of 2017 she will officially be a graduate of WCU, leading her one step closer to finally achieving her dream of becoming a child psychologist even though she came into education long after she was a child. "I am starting to see even more non-traditional older students on campus and that's kind of exciting because that adds more diversity, and as far as diversity goes, if you don't set any boundaries for other people then you have a bigger chance of learning more about them." Non-traditional students are becoming increasingly common as the older generations are pushing to achieve their own dreams as well, and with people like Angelia Leatherman at the forefront the future is looking ever brighter for all generations of students.

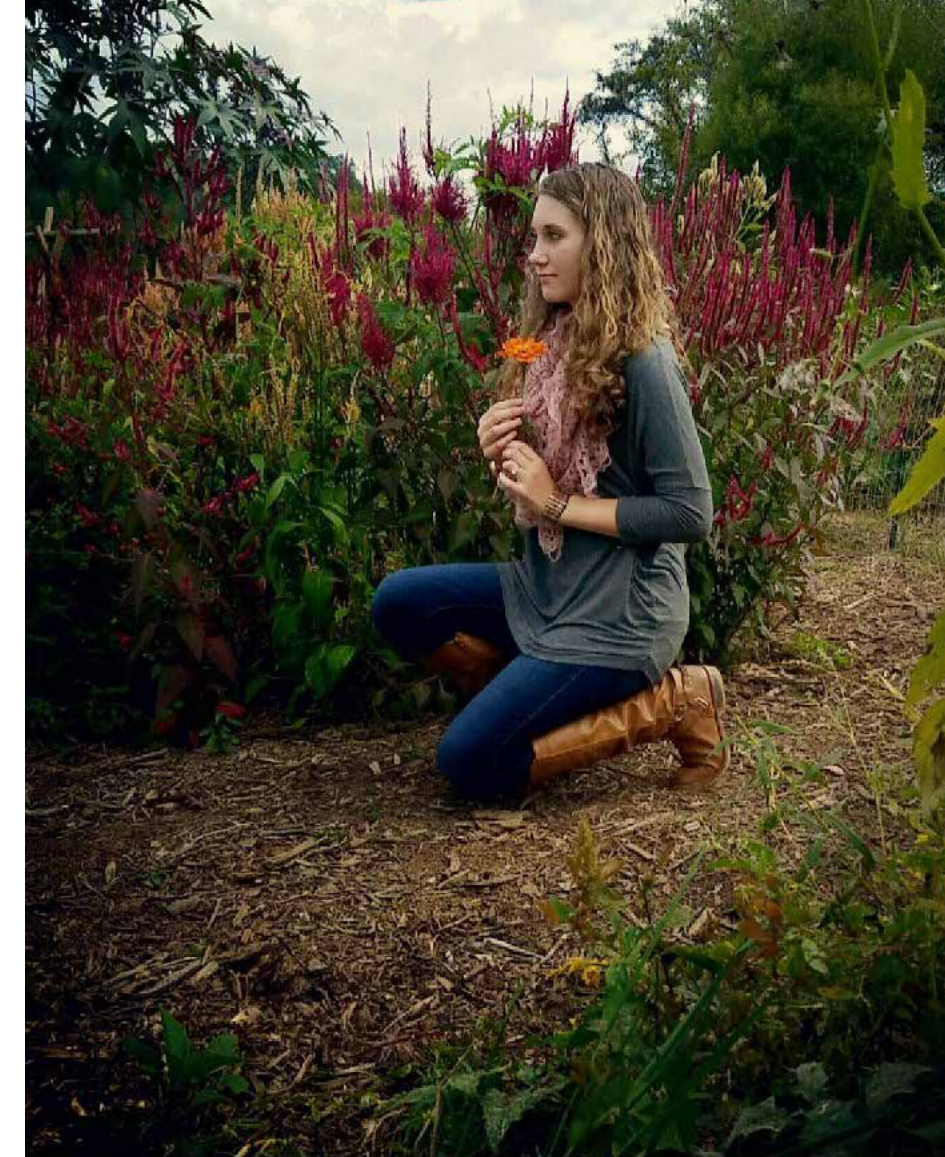




By Kristin Toler

Picture a young cheerleader putting on her bows and blush, foundation and mascara, getting ready for tumbling practice, just a normal warm-up routine for this high school sophomore. "Appearance is everything," she says "especially in competitive cheerleading." She begins her warm-up, stretching as usual. She feels the burn, every muscle pushing and pulling beneath her pale skin. As she makes her way on to her feet and adjusts her clothing, a sudden weariness comes over her, along with aching, dizziness, and double vision. She tried to shake it off, but something's not right. After failing some basic tumbles, she sits down, knowing that she can't carry on the way she's feeling. Her symptoms progressively worsen and later that night her mother decides to take her to the hospital. After hours of waiting and multiple tests, she is sent to another hospital without a diagnosis. It isn't until February 9th, 2014, after many more tests, that Audre Tyner is diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS).

Tyner describes her condition this way: "MS is an autoimmune disease that affects the central nervous system by stripping myelin from the nerve shaft, causing the body to short circuit. It causes lesions on the brain and spinal cord which in turn affects motor skills and a variety of other things." The diagnosis took its toll on her both physically and emotionally. "I knew I was angry and I could feel it inside," she said of her temporary inability to speak. "But I was trapped and couldn't let my emotions out. The anger just crowded my throat." Normal activities became a struggle as Tyner was reduced to the physical ability of a toddler. Her mobility was limited and at times severe enough that she required a wheelchair. Despite her struggles however, she never gave up. She fought through long, hard days of physical, speech, and occupational therapy. As she grew stronger physically, mentally,



and emotionally, Tyner found her spiritual faith growing stronger with God as well. She no longer felt angry because of her disease, instead, she admitted that she was blessed to still be alive.

At the time of her diagnosis, Tyner lived in south Georgia, a place known for extreme heat and humidity. She discovered that MS made her heat sensitive and her symptoms grew worse. It was because of this, her family decided to move to the cooler climate of north Georgia. Climate later guided Tyner's search for colleges. When she found Western Carolina University, she realized the cooler mountain weather of Cullowhee would help keep her symptoms manageable. Now a freshman at Western, she is majoring in Communication Sciences and Disorders with a specialty in speech pathology. MS was a determining factor in her choice of major, she

says. "Ideally, I would like to work in a pediatrics hospital with trauma patients. I would one day like to open my own clinic with the possibility of working with MS patients." Tyner added, "I think that having been through being diagnosed will make it much easier to relate to my patients. I would ideally like to work with teens just because I was diagnosed when I was 15 and I understand how difficult it can be."

Tyner declares that she tells her MS the rules and doesn't let it control or take over her life. "I would definitely go through it all again in a heartbeat because it's what brought me to where I am today; an overcomer." That is how Tyner thinks of herself, as someone who overcomes obstacles. When she looks back to the time before her diagnosis when she thought appearance was everything, now she says, "You are beautifully and wonderfully made."



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# ALUMNI UPDATES

## ALLISON HADDON | *by Colby Nelson*

Allison graduated in May 2016 with a bachelor's degree in Geology. After her graduation, Haddon proceeded to graduate school at Northern Arizona University. She is pursuing her master's degree in Geology, with a focus in Geophysics. Her project at Northern Arizona is focused on studying the tectonics of the Andes in South America. While at Western, Haddon was a Resident Assistant in the Honors College, a member of the Student Government Senate, and held a position on the executive board of Alpha Chi Omega. Once she completes her master's degree, she plans on celebrating her accomplishment by backpacking the Grand Canyon from rim to rim.

When you were five, what did you want to be when you grew up? "I wanted to be a meteorologist."

## CASSANDRA SMITH | *by Kristen Toler*

Cassandra graduated in May 2016 with a B.S. in Interior Design and is currently working as an interior designer in the hospitality industry for FF&E Logistical, mainly working on hotels. While at Western Carolina, Smith was Treasurer, Vice President, and President of the Interior Design Club. She wants to expand her knowledge about green and environmental design by passing the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) exam and the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ) certification exam. "I love working with people and helping to figure out how to improve their relationships with their living/working environment." Her dream is to work in residential design in the Durham area.

When you were five years old, what did you want to be when you grew up? "A veterinarian, because I loved animals."

## CHRISTINE POOLE | *by Hailey Eidse*

Christine graduated in spring of 2016 with a bachelor's degree in Athletic Training. While attending Western she won the EYE on FYE Bucket List 2012-2013 and got the opportunity to present her poster and platform presentation at the WCU Undergraduate Exposition and Graduate Research Symposium. Following her graduation she competed in a marathon on the Great Wall of China to raise money for lung cancer research. Christine is now working on getting her master's degree in Applied Physiology and Kinesiology with a concentration in Athletic Training at the University of Florida. She is also working as the Head Athletic Trainer at Bell High School in Florida. In the future she hopes to work in a pediatric children's hospital and would love to work with US Youth Olympic athletes.

When you were five, what did you want to be when you grew up? "I wanted to be a veterinarian."

## CHRISTY BARKER | *by Nathaniel Evans*

Christy graduated in May of 2016 with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. While at WCU, she remained on the Dean's List for all eight semesters. She was a member of the Leadership Institute, the National Society of Leadership and Success, and Sigma Theta Tau, the honors society for nursing. She received the Ethics Award 2016 for her Pre-licensure in BSN program. Currently, Christy works for the Catawba Valley Medical Center in Hickory, NC as a registered nurse on the medical unit. While she is still debating between Nurse Practitioner and other options, within the next two to five years, she wants to be enrolled in a Master's or PhD program in Nursing.

When you were five, what did you want to be when you grew up? Whether odd, or premonition, Christy wanted to be a nurse when she was five years old, saying that she would "walk around with all [her] kiddie nursing tools and 'check up' on all [her] toys and stuffed animals."

## ERIN MULLENS | *by Ashton Cannon*

Erin graduated summa cum laude in May 2016 with a B.S. in Nutrition and Dietetics. While at WCU she served as president of the academic fraternity Alpha Lambda Delta. She is now at Brevard College working towards a Teaching Licensure in Secondary Education and Teaching and plans to become a high school science and math teacher. Throughout her career at WCU, Mullens was involved in many different areas and has continued to live that out as a proud supporter of the Brevard Little Theater and a substitute and after-school teacher at Transylvania County Schools. Mullens is also working as a nutrition counselor and owns a private business. A publication that Mullens completed through study here at WCU made it into the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics this year (FNCE 2016).

When you were five, what did you want to be when you grew up? "I wanted to be a witch when I grew up. I thought they were real."

## REBECCA SHERRILL | *by Ethan Leatherman*

Rebecca graduated with a bachelor's degree in Social Work in May of 2016. She is currently on a scholarship at the University of Pittsburgh working on her master's degree in Social Work. Her concentration is in Direct Practice with a focus on Children, Youth, and Families. She is currently interning at an inner city school and working with children from kindergarten to fifth grade and developing social skills through a non-profit called Homewood Children's Village. She has a huge passion for children in general and helping people as well, which lead to her career in Social work. Her projected graduation date is December 2017.

## KAITLYN SPEER | *by Maribeth Dockery*

Kaitlyn graduated from WCU's School of Nursing in 2016. During her senior year, she received the Antonio Bonarrigo Nursing Scholarship, the Christopher Thomas Cash Scholarship, and a Mission Hospitals Foundation Scholarship. She now lives in Youngsville, North Carolina and works as a nurse at Duke University Hospital on a Surgical/Transplant unit. Since graduation, Speer has begun attending a "wonderful church in Raleigh." Her hobbies include being outside and reading historical fiction. She has also started playing piano.

When you were five years old, what did you want to be when you grew up? "A nurse."

## HEATHER ERVIN | *by Sean Anderson*

Heather graduated in May 2016 from Western Carolina University with a B.S. in Mathematics. She is now a graduate student in the Library Science Department at East Carolina University working towards her Master's Degree. Once Heather accomplishes that, her intentions include pursuing a Doctorate in Mathematics. She originally chose her major to become a high school math teacher, with a major in history being the only other major she even brought into consideration. She chose to attend WCU because of four plus one program that allowed a student to earn a bachelor's and master's degree in only five years. This program was unfortunately removed, but she continued her path at Western due to the dedicated faculty in the Mathematics department. Heather volunteered with American Red Cross before she moved to Cullowhee and throughout her time at here at Western Carolina University.

When you were five, what did you want to be when you grew up? "At five years old, I wanted to be a French fry cook when I grew up because I spent a large portion of time at my grandfather's restaurant."

## SARAH TROMBLEY | *by Hannah Cothren*

Sarah graduated magna cum laude in May 2016 with a B.S. in Business Administration and Law. While at Western, she was Resident Assistant at Scott Hall, Vice President of Marketing for the Resident Student Association (RSA), President of RSA, and treasurer for the Honors College Board of Directors. She is currently pursuing her juris doctor degree at Elon University School of Law. Her plans following graduation from Elon are to join the military and become Judge Advocate General or work with a District Attorney or Public Defender.

When you were five, what did you want to be when you grew up? "I had my heart set on becoming a veterinarian and to save all the animals in the world."

## JESSICA RICCHIO | *by Allie Pratt*

Jessica graduated in May of 2016 with a bachelor's degree in Environmental Health Science and a minor in Biology with a Pre-Med focus. While at Western, Jessica was on the Dean's List all eight semesters and the Chancellor's list for six of those. Her senior year, she received the coveted Leadership Award in the Environmental Health Sciences Department. While at Western she presented multiple research posters at various expos such as the WCU Undergraduate Expo, the National Conferences on Undergraduate Research (NCUR), the Oak Ridge National Laboratory Student Session, and the 2015 American Society of Safety Engineers Professional Development Conference and Exposition (ASSEPD). Currently Jessica is working on her Master of Science in Industrial Hygiene degree from the University of Iowa. After graduating she hopes to obtain a job in health and safety in an international company or in a national lab with the federal government.

When you were five, what did you want to be when you grew up? "My career choice switched several times but the most memorable one was growing up to be an artist."







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